



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Department for the Aging

Julie Christopher, Commissioner

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SUBJECT

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(Janet Schaefer)

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COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department for the Aging
Julie Christopher, Commissioner

MEMORANDUM

TO: Executive Directors
Area Agencies on Aging

FROM: Janet H. Schaefer

DATE: July 25, 2006

SUBJECT: AoA Publication – *How to Lower the Risk of Heat-Related Illnesses*

Message from the Assistant Secretary on Aging about Heat Waves and Seniors

Many parts of the country are now experiencing excessive heat. As we know, heat-related illnesses are among the top weather-related killers, and the elderly population is particularly vulnerable.

The Administration on Aging has developed a fact sheet on "How to Lower the Risk of Heat-Related Illnesses", a copy of which is attached. This fact sheet contains helpful hints and information on where to turn for assistance to prevent heat-related illnesses. For a copy of the fact sheet visit:

http://www.aoa.gov/press/spotlight_on/spotlight_on_pf.asp

We urge you to provide any assistance which may be needed and to share this information with seniors who may be especially vulnerable to excessive heat, particularly those who are home bound who may not have air conditioning or other cooling units.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

How to Lower the Risk of Heat-Related Illnesses:

Older persons are at particular risk for heat related illnesses. These illnesses can be as serious as they may be preventable. Hot weather is one of the common causes of heat illnesses. Dehydration is also a common cause of heat illness. Older adults and their caregivers should be aware of symptoms, how to prevent heat-related illness, and available assistance with paying energy bills.

What are the symptoms?

Individuals can experience a variety of symptoms of heat illness. Symptoms such as heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heatstroke are increasingly severe and can lead to death.

How can you prevent heat illness?

Some ways to prevent heat illness are:

- Dress for the weather. Wear loose-fitting, lightweight. Some people find natural fabrics such as cotton to be cooler than synthetic fibers. Light-colored clothes reflect the sun and heat better than dark colors. If you are unsure about what to wear, ask a friend or family member to help you select clothing that will help you stay cool.
- Drink plenty of liquids — water or fruit and vegetable juices. Avoid drinks containing caffeine or alcohol. They make you lose more fluids. If your doctor has told you to limit your liquids, ask what you should do when it is very hot.
- Rest frequently and seek shade when possible.
- Avoid hot crowded places. Plan trips during non-rush hour times.
- If you live in a home or apartment without fans or air conditioning, be sure to follow these steps to lower your chance of heat problems:
 - ✓ open windows at night;
 - ✓ create cross-ventilation by opening windows on two sides of the building;
 - ✓ cover windows when they are in direct sunlight; and
 - ✓ keep curtains, shades or blinds drawn during the hottest part of the day.
 - ✓ try to spend at least 2 hours a day (if possible during the hottest part of the day) some place air-conditioned — for example, the shopping mall, the movies, the library, a senior center, or a friend's house if you don't have air conditioning. If necessary, take a taxi. **Don't** stand outside waiting for a bus.

- ✓ Pay attention to the weather reports. You are more at risk as the temperature or humidity rise, or when there is an air pollution alert in effect.
- ✓ Limit exercise and lots of activities when it is hot.
- Call your local health department to see if there are any heat-relief shelters in your area.

Is there any assistance available with paying energy bills?

If you cannot afford to run your air conditioner this summer, help may be available through the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) available in your state. This program may pay a portion of energy bills of eligible low-income persons

Contact the [National Energy Assistance Referral \(NEAR\)](#) project. NEAR is a free service for persons who want information on where to apply for LIHEAP help. NEAR can be contacted by e-mail at energy_assistance@ncat.org (please include your city, county and state along with your e-mail message) or by using NEAR's toll-free phone number **1-866-674-6327** (or 1-866-NRG-NEAR). Information is also available at http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/liheap/consumer_information/index.html.

Check with your local area agency on aging or local senior center to see if anyone can provide you with a fan, an air-conditioner, or assist you in other ways in coping with the heat.

For more information:

- Hyperthermia: Too Hot for Your Health
<http://www.niapublications.org/agepages/hyperther.asp/> (materials also available in Spanish)
- Heat Emergencies at Medline Plus
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000056.htm>
- Heat illness, National Library of Medicine click <http://medlineplus.gov/> and type in heat illness (materials also available in Spanish)
- Tips for Preventing Heat-Related Illness, Centers for Disease Control
<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/heattips.asp>
- Heat Exhaustion and Heatstroke: What You Need To Know, American Academy of Physicians at <http://familydoctor.org/088.xml>
- Extreme Heat, FEMA at <http://www.fema.gov/hazard/heat/index.shtm>. Includes First Aid for Heat-Induced Illnesses